TBI Television Business International

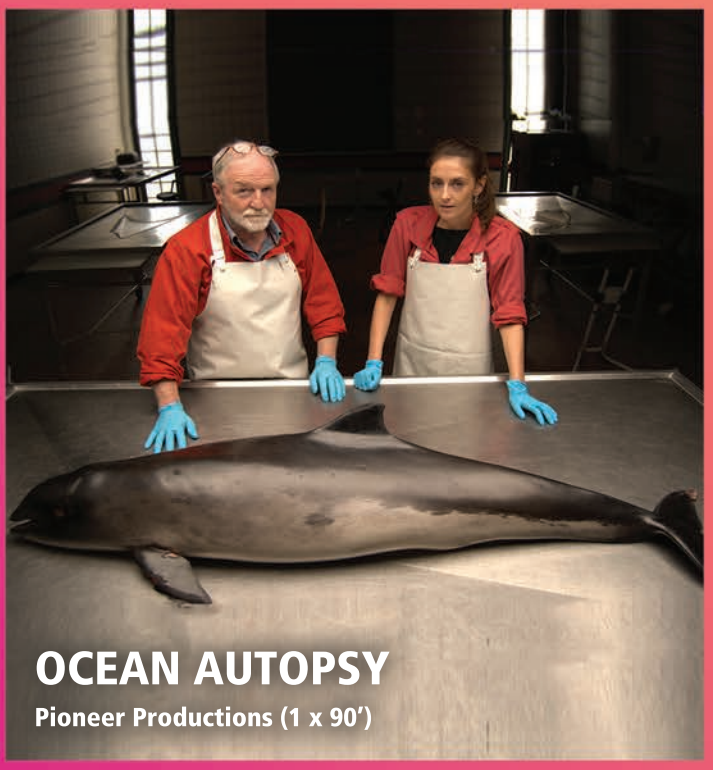
UK Screenings

BBC Studios
Showcase lowdown **6**

Distribution roundtable
Deal-making 2.0 **18**

HANDMADE IN AFRICA

Clear Story (3 x 30')

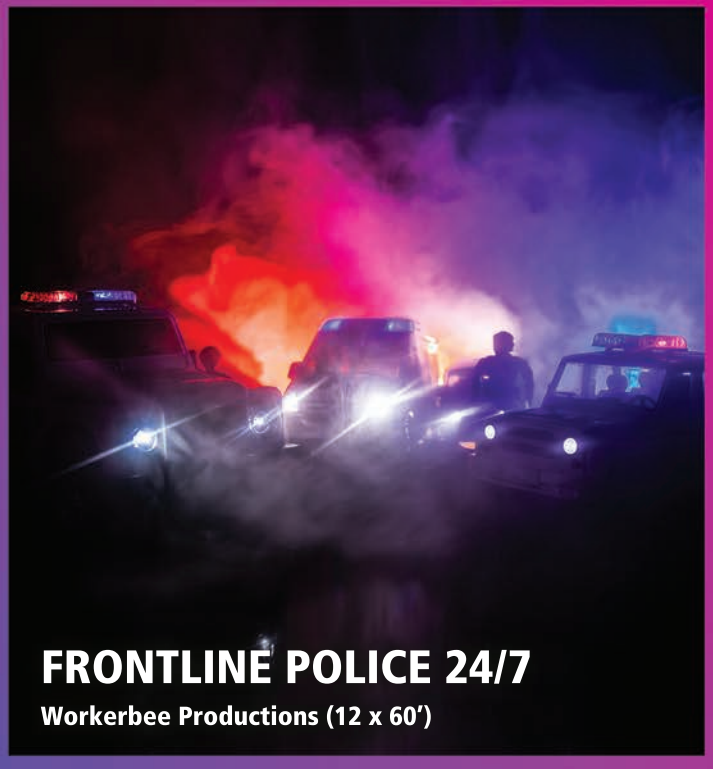


OCEAN AUTOPSY

Pioneer Productions (1 x 90')

FARE DODGERS

Middlechild Productions (4 x 60')



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UK Screenings issue February/March 2020

Editor's note

Over the space of just a few years, the number of events taking place in the UK around BBC Studios Showcase has proliferated. The UK public broadcaster's commercial arm remains the hot ticket, with hundreds of buyers descending on Liverpool to see the latest content, but there are now a raft of other events across the following week that are put on by London-based distributors. To help you get around, TBI has put together a handy map detailing where everything is taking place - huge thanks to our art director and design supremo Matthew Humberstone for putting it all together. We also speak to senior execs at BBCS, ITV Studios, All3Media International and others to find out what they are proffering to buyers, and report back on a fascinating roundtable discussion featuring some of the brightest minds in the business who are helping mid-sized distribution firms excel. Welcome to the UK!

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Well-being Tracy Forsyth

Networking – be the best meeting of the day

In this month's Well-being column, former BBC Studios exec and corporate wellness coach Tracy Forsyth explains how to excel at networking

In my role as executive coach, the subject of networking frequently gets raised by clients who are either wanting to move on to another challenge or who've had their head down in their current company for such a long time that they've lost touch with contacts over the years.

For many, networking is seen as a professional chore and something only to be done when you need something. For others, it feels really awkward to cold call someone out of the blue because you want something from them. And many struggle with what they actually say when they've landed the networking coffee or half-hour meeting.

Well, over the years I've got to a place where I actually love networking meetings. It helps to be curious about others, passionate about what you do and clear in your purpose. Good networking, I believe, involves a meaningful exchange which is appreciated by and beneficial to both sides, even if that benefit is not immediate. Even better networking is when you really enjoy the meeting and, for the other person, it becomes the best meeting of the day.

How to you ensure you make it the best meeting of the day? Here are my top tips.

Connect

Be genuinely delighted to be with that person. Explain why you are excited to see them. Excitement and positivity are infectious. Make sure you've done your research beforehand, so you know what achievements they've recently pulled off. Compliment them on their work. Everyone appreciates being appreciated.

Who You Are

Have a pertinent summary of who you are ready to go. Don't give them your life story, choose the bits that would be most relevant to them now. This means a sentence about what you do and three experiences to illustrate how you've best done it. Use anecdotes to bring your experiences to life, talk about what you've most loved and how you've tackled the challenges along the way. Talking passionately about your work makes it ten times more interesting and engaging to others.

What You Want

Be clear about what you want. Don't waste their time being vague or coy. It's helpful to them if you are clear and direct about what you are looking for, be it a new challenge, new contacts, advice or just to make yourself known to them for the future. Don't be squeamish about this: the clearer you are, the more chance you have of actually achieving what you want.

Why them

At this point, make clear why you are so interested in them and why you think your experience is relevant to them or their company. Explain what excites you about what they do and the prospect that you could be working with them. Present your thoughts and ideas about what you can bring to them. Explore opportunities they may have or get an idea of how things may evolve to a point they need you. Be enthusiastic and engaged.

Give Back

Finally, before you finish, remember it's not all take - think about how you can give back and be useful to them. You may have a contact at a company or a connection they'd like. You may have discussed a topic you could shine further light on later. You may be part of a group you could invite them to or speak at. The possibilities are endless. The point is to think about not only what you get out of a meeting but also what they get too. Don't go empty-handed, leave them with a present, figuratively speaking. And enjoy! **TBI**

Tracy is a creative mentor for the Channel 4 Indie Growth Fund, the producer of the WFTV mentoring scheme and a professional executive coach. Follow her at walterwootze.com

About Town

Miami heat

AVOD might have been the industry trend that was talked up most at NATPE Miami in January, but away from business, it was the plight of iguanas falling from trees that caused furrowed brows poolside.

Despite, an unseasonably chilly snap during NATPE Miami – which caused the cold-blooded reptiles to become dormant and drop to the ground - the event was still warmly greeted by international execs, with celebrities including Gloria Estefan and Jada Pinkett Smith heading to Florida for the annual event that kicks off the conference and market cycle.

The Good Wife co-creator Michelle King was in town to introduce its star Christine Baranski, who was one of the recipients of NATPE's 17th Brandon Tartikoff Legacy Awards, along with ABC Entertainment president Karey Burke, producer-writer Courtney A. Kemp, Telemundo Global Studios topper Marcos Santana and CNN Worldwide's Jeff Zucker.

Elsewhere, *Queer Eye*'s Carson Kressley hosted Parrot Analytics' annual Global TV Demand Awards and the cold weather did little to stop delegates enjoying the numerous parties on offer, which included ViacomCBS welcoming Drew Barrymore to the sunshine state to push her new US daytime show.

The Good Fight's Christine Baranski

Jada Pinkett Smith

Global TV Demand Awards

Austin arrival

New Orleans has become a popular destination for the Realscreen Summit and those in the unscripted game again descended on The Big Easy for deals, discussions and drinks aplenty.

Attendees packed into the event's awards ceremony to pay homage to shows including Lifetime's *Surviving R. Kelly*, while Alfred Street Industries' duo Jane Lipsitz and Dan Cutforth (pictured) were inducted into the hall of fame. Organisers also revealed the annual event would be moving to Austin, Texas as of 2022.

Bright lights

ViacomCBS Networks Americas pulled out all the stops for its party extravaganza at the art deco-inspired Alfred I. DuPont Building during NATPE, proffering cocktails, canapes and crooning from talents such as Despacito singer Luis Fonsi and Becky G.

Swings and Roundabouts

4.4 The BBC's VOD service iPlayer scored a record-breaking 2019, with shows such as *Peaky Blinders* helping it to 4.4 billion streams over the year

29% High-end TV production in the UK was up by almost a third in 2019, hitting £1.66bn ($2.16bn) thanks to shows such as *The Crown*

1.2 US streamer HBO Max revealed it had cost AT&T's WarnerMedia over $1.2bn in forgone revenue during the 4th quarter by taking back rights to shows such as *Friends*

420 Netflix CEO Reed Hastings said new competitors and price changes had slowed US growth, with just 420,000 subscribers added in Q4 - missing its 600,000 target

Earning potential

Annual export figures reveal the UK to be keeping pace with global demand for content across genres

The global plans for US-based streamers might have been the story of the past year but UK producers and their eye-catching shows continue to provide fuel for the country's surging export numbers.

Drama was again the frontrunner in 2018/19, with series such as *Bodyguard* and *Killing Eve* propelling the UK's TV exports to record sales of £1.4bn ($1.8bn), while worldwide deals between UK companies and global SVOD's surged by more than 50% over the same period.

The figures, revealed in UK trade body Pact's TV Exports Report, show that drama accounted for 48% of total sales during 2018/19, with non-scripted factual series such as *Blue Planet II* pulling in 23% of revenue and entertainment shows including *Love Island* accounting for 15%.

Demand for library content also remained strong, with programming that was four or more years old estimated to account for 36% of sales. Broadcasters and streamers also spent similar amounts on UK shows, with free TV outfits accounting for £322m, pay TV buyers spending £293m and SVOD's contributing £342m.

That helped drive figures up by 7% overall on 2017/18, with the US remaining the dominant buyer, accounting for 32% (£444m) of all sales. North American revenues as a whole were down 1% year-on-year to £531m.

The report, produced for Pact by media consultancy 3Vision, also showed that UK revenues from worldwide deals with services such as Netflix and Amazon were up to £58m, a 56% increase on last year. North American firms were the key partners for co-productions, contributing £81m.

Europe maintained its position as the primary destination for formats, with £47m in both 2017/18 and 2018/19. The sale of formats to the US doubled from £9m to £20m year-on-year, but European companies remained the key buyers, accounting for 55% (£47m). However, formats accounted for just 6% of UK total sales, with finished programmes securing 69%. **TBI**

2018/19 £58m

2017/18 £37m

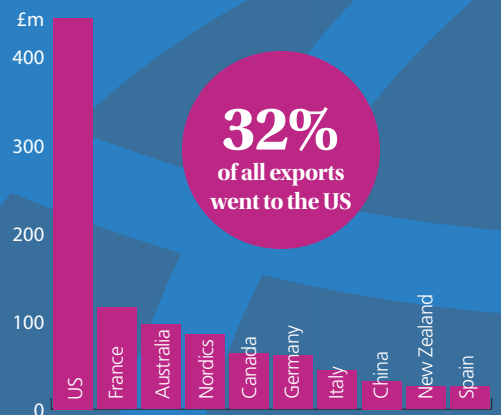
2016/17 £14m

Pan-territory deals from SVOD's

India, China and Latin America

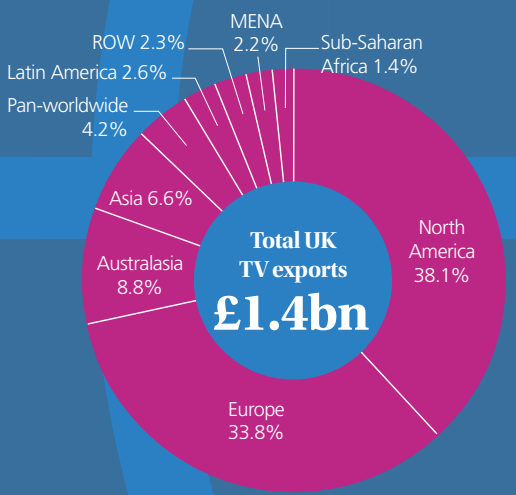
Territories where UK companies feel best opportunities for expansion

The top 10 export markets (£m)

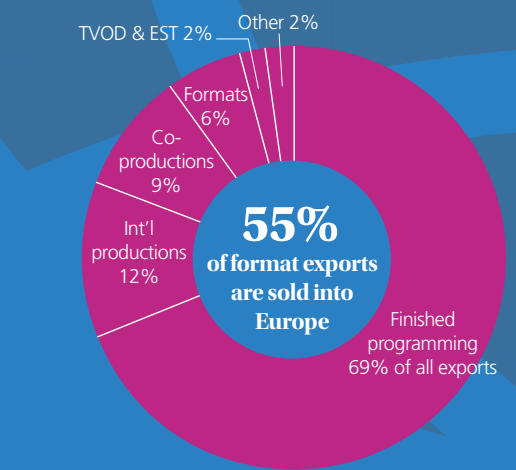


32% of all exports went to the US

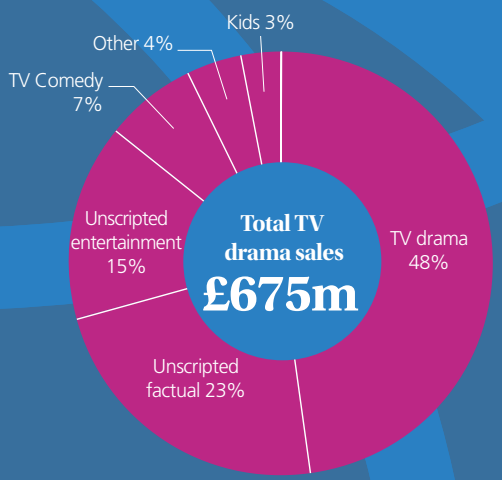
Regional breakdown



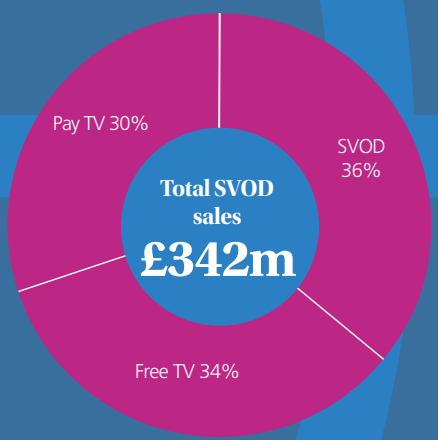
Deal breakdown



Genre breakdown



Who's buying?



Best sellers

48% *Killing Eve* was among shows that helped fuel UK drama growth, accounting for almost half of the country's total exports in 2018/19

23% BBC Studios' natural history epic *Blue Planet II* propelled non-scripted factual, which reeled in almost a quarter of UK export revenues

15% ITV's *Love Island* was among the UK's entertainment offerings, securing a sixth of export revenues

200+ David Tennant and Michael Sheen's *Good Omens* aired on the UK's BBC Two but debuted on Amazon - which claims to be available in 200+ territories

187 Richard Madden-fronted *Bodyguard* aired in the UK on BBC One but was snapped up by Netflix in 187 countries after a global deal was struck

New horizons

BBC Studios is looking to capitalise on new streaming entrants with myriad financing models that will keep it relevant as competition hots up. Distribution chief Paul Dempsey talks to Richard Middleton

Few companies in the cluttered world of content compare to BBC Studios. The distribution and production giant has international tentacles but is finding itself in competition with an increasing number of US competitors with deep pockets.

Meanwhile, its own mothership, UK public broadcaster the BBC, is facing budgetary and political pressures like never before. While most buyers heading to BBC Studios Showcase in Liverpool consistently talk up the public broadcaster's impact on the world of TV, domestic forces mean BBCS's contribution to its home country's broadcast operation has arguably never been more important.

Certainly, few other companies could entice so many international buyers in one go to view its wares. Inadvertently, BBCS has helped to develop an entire week of events that are propelling UK-based content forwards – but Showcase remains the key event for most of those headed to UK shores.

The North Water stars Stephen Graham and is being shot in the Arctic

Talent including Will Arnett, Stephen Merchant, Freddie Flintoff, Paddy McGuinness, Chris Harris and Bollywood stars Ishaan Khatter and Tabu are among those set to appear, with attendees getting first-looks at scripted projects such as See-Saw Films and Rhombus Media's *The North Water*, comedy *The First Team*, Terry Pratchett-inspired *The Watch* and *A Suitable Boy*, produced by BBCS-owned Lookout Point.

Those shows highlight the variety of programming on offer but also shine a light on how BBCS is fighting to remain relevant in the ever-inflating scripted market, with *A Suitable Boy* – about the story of a spirited university student who comes of age in North India in the 1950s – coming from its wholly owned prodco Lookout Point.

Such deals help to provide BBCS with a pipeline of content and Dempsey says his company is focused on supporting both established talent and up-and-comers.

He adds that the cost of drama per hour "is going into unseen ambitions" and that, combined with the surging demand for the best creatives, means BBCS gets involved "much earlier in the conversations."

But he is clear that there are "no blueprints around the bigger, high profile projects now." The influx of streamers – with WarnerMedia's HBO Max and NBCUniversal's Peacock set to join incumbents such as Netflix and Amazon plus Disney+ and Apple TV – means that the "quality spectrum" is changing, Dempsey says, providing opportunities that can be exploited across genres.

NBC, for example, recently ordered 10-part blue chip wildlife series *The New World* from BBCS' acclaimed Natural History Unit, with Peacock retaining "significant distribution rights globally and across platforms."

In times gone by, BBCS might have looked to sell the show globally but the increasing international reach of US-based companies means BBCS must adapt to a new environment.

"It's a period when all sorts of different models are operating adjacent to each other," Dempsey says. "We've long ceased to be only in the finished tape sales business, now we are much more at the forefront and working out the best commercial models for particular projects.

"That could be working with a partner, where we primarily bring production capability or on others we can make the most of our distribution reach."

The lure of BBCS's science and natural history programming remains strong, Dempsey adds, with buyers in Liverpool offered an exclusive first look at Silverback Films' *A Perfect Planet* and the new series of *Spy In The Wild*, from John Downer Productions.

The format front, meanwhile, remains solid. *Doctor Foster* has been remade in India (known as *Out Of Love*), entertainment veteran *Dancing With The Stars* recently entered Lithuania, marking its 57th territory, and Discovery Networks Nordics has just remade *Top Gear* in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Stars of the UK original – still a global hit as a finished tape - will be in attendance at Showcase, with Freddie Flintoff, Paddy McGuinness and Chris Harris sharing an exclusive look at their latest adventures.

While BBCS is employing all manner of models for programming, its direct-to-consumer dalliances have been limited. Dempsey reiterates that North American streamer Britbox could be launched into "a handful of other markets" but adds that its channels "are pretty stable."

"Of course the long-term prognosis for linear is an evolution to digital over time," he says, "but we're being very careful not to leave linear behind." **TBI**

"All sorts of different models are operating adjacent to each other - we're working out the best for each project"
Paul Dempsey, BBC Studios

The latest instalment of *Spy In The Wild* is among BBC Studios' factual slate

Mark Reynolds,
director of Unscripted, BBC Studios

At this month's BBC Showcase, a key launch will be *Perfect Planet* – a series that BBC Studios unscripted portfolio director Mark Reynolds describes as "the next landmark natural history series" to air on BBC this year.

Produced by *Our Planet* maker Silverback Pictures and co-produced by Tencent Penguin Pictures, France Télévisions and The Open University, the series examines how wildlife is affected by weather, ocean currents and humans.

As well as natural history, Reynold's remit at BBCS encompasses all specialist factual, music, documentary and current affairs – investing in shows, brokering co-production deals and handling distribution, both for BBCS Production programming as well as from other UK independent producers.

BBCS has stakes or first look deals with indies including Expectation, Amazing Productions and Mighty Productions, and Reynolds says the key focus on deals is "what fits with the best interests of the producer" – making sure that BBCS brings in the right partners and maximises the value of the producer's IP. Players like Amazon and Netflix, he adds, provide "a fantastic opportunity".

Reynolds adds that there's a growing appetite for long-form documentary that can help explain the complex political and economic forces affecting the world. He picks out upcoming series *Putin: A Russian Spy*, made by Rogan Productions for Channel 4, as a notable addition.

Tim Dams

Caroline Stone, director of Independent Drama and Martin Rakusen, director of Drama, BBC Studios

BBC Studios is taking a broad range of drama, both in tone and budget, to this year's BBC Showcase.

Director of drama Martin Rakusen, who focuses on dramas produced by the BBC Studios Productions division, picks out three very different series to highlight: sci-fi drama *The Watch*, inspired by Terry Pratchett's Discworld novels, which is being produced for BBC America; crime drama *We Hunt Together*, which is being made for UKTV's Alibi channel; and BritBox commission *The Sister Boniface Mysteries*, a light-hearted murder mystery.

Meanwhile, Caroline Stone, director of independent drama, selects Steve McQueen's London-set 1970s anthology *Small Axe* from Turbine Studios, See-Saw Films' thriller T*he North Water*, and Drama Republic's adaptation of David Nicholls best-selling novel, *Us*.

"They show we're working with the best film and Hollywood talent," says Stone, who leads on shows made with indie producers. She says BBCS is now working much more closely with US broadcasters such as HBO (*His Dark Materials*), streamers such as Netflix (*The End of the F***ing World*), and broadcasters like ZDF and France Televisions (*The Majorca Files*), as well as financiers like Anton (*McMafia*), to fund shows. Rakusen adds that the quality "benchmark" has never been higher. "It's a constant reminder that the strength and conviction of storytelling have to cut through."

Tim Dams

The First Team is being exec produced by Liverpool FC chairman Tom Werner, who worked on *Roseanne*

The Watch is set in a world where crime has been legalised

Jonathan Blyth, director of comedy, BBC Studios

As director of comedy at BBC Studios, Jonathan Blyth has a broad remit.

He works with the in-house comedy team in BBC Studios Productions, led by Josh Cole, as well as some 50 indie comedy producers to develop, finance and monetise shows on a global basis.

To underline the role that BBCS plays in comedy, he cites upcoming series *The First Team*, which will launch at BBC Showcase. Produced by Fudge Park and written by Iain Morris and Damon Beesley (*The Inbetweeners*), *The First Team* follows the misadventures of three young football players.

BBCS financed development and scripts for the series, which was subsequently greenlit by BBC2, and is handling global distribution rights. BBCS was "heavily involved in the editorial" with Morris and Beesley, says Blyth, helping to develop a show that both had global appeal but also worked for a home audience on BBC2.

He adds that BBCS can also help bring extra resource to shows, citing Michaela Coel's *January 22nd*. The show explores the question of sexual consent in contemporary life and is "really of the moment" says Blyth. He flew out with Coel (*Chewing Gum*, *Black Earth Rising*) and producer Various Artists to pitch *January 22nd* to possible US partners last March, ahead of production starting. HBO boarded for US, Canada and international distribution later in the year.

Similarly, BBCS helped to bring Amazon Studios on board Stephen Merchant's recently greenlit BBC1 series *The Offenders*. The streamer has rights in the US, Canada and Australia, helping to "up the ambition" of the series.

Tim Dams

Thin Ice

We Got This

BRAND NEW DRAMA

Banijay Rights

Bäckström

GR5: Into The Wilderness

Studious thinking

ITV Studios is taking to the UK Screenings stage with an eclectic scripted slate, following an expansive structural revamp over the past six months. Managing director of global distribution Ruth Berry tells Richard Middleton what's in store and what its slate says about the international TV business

It has been a busy six months at ITV Studios. In October, the global arm of the UK commercial broadcaster unveiled plans to restructure its distribution business, rejigging its senior management structure as part of the process.

Fast-forward to February and the appointment of former Endemol Shine Group exec Lisa Perrin, who had headed up its Creative Networks division, marked the final step in the new-look team.

She will head up international production in the new structure, which sees what was ITVS Global Entertainment split into three divisions: Creative Network, headed up by Mike Beale; Global Entertainment, led by Maarten Meijs; and Global Distribution, fronted by Ruth Berry.

For the latter, it's been a busy period following the launch of series such as *The War Of The Worlds* and *World On Fire*, and returners such as *Vera* and *Poldark*. Berry is preparing to unveil sneak peaks and more to buyers at its drama event at UK Screenings but she admits competition for eyeballs is high.

"It is a tough and competitive world but with the right titles, we absolutely cut through and go from strength to strength with our partners," she says, adding that the rise in cost of drama – largely derived from ever-increasing streamer ambitions – continues.

Romulus is among the first dramas to use Latin as a spoken language

"There is still an inflation in drama costs, but in my recent experience, the producers that we are working with are seeking to manage it really well. It's a challenge, but with a broad portfolio and a scaled business, we're well placed to find great drama spanning multiple budget levels for our wide range of buyers," she adds.

Crime drama continues to surge, evidenced in ITVS's scripted slate at UK Screenings, but there are also "feel-good dramas" like *Cold Feet*, the ninth season of which returns this year, and remakes. "*Une Belle Histoire* [the French adaptation of the UK comedy], is also being well-received internationally and *Schitt's Creek* and *Brassic* are some of the other brilliantly feel-good shows, which are part of our broader portfolio."

Berry and ITVS have also been adapting to the fast-changing landscape for distributors, in which they are now marketers, commissioners and financiers. And that's not just on the scripted side.

"It's fair to say over the last 12 to 24 months that

Real-life drama focus

Honour "From Hera Pictures and for ITV, this is a really powerful story," says Berry. It stars Keeley Hawes as the detective who brought five killers to justice in the heartbreaking true story of Banaz Mahmod, the young Londoner murdered by her own family

Pembrokeshire Murders World Productions is behind this three-part mini-series depicting the real-life pursuit of a cold-blooded serial killer. Berry describes it as "a really important story to tell"

distribution businesses have started to see deficit financing becoming more and more commonplace for non-scripted productions," Berry says. "It's not new to us, we're very experienced in dealing with that on the scripted side, so it's something we're really quite comfortable with.

"The ability to deficit non-scripted shows too has really helped us grow the base of projects we're working with in the genre and very soon we'll be needing a factual festival too," she jokes.

For ITVS and other global distributors riding the peaks and troughs of the sales business over the past 12 months or so, the allure of new buyers – from HBO Max and NBCUniversal's Peacock to smaller entrants such as Topic and fast-growing AVOD's such as Tubi – is clear.

"Deals with OTT players and streamers are still really exciting for us, we've been having lots of interesting discussions about our new projects coming up with them," Berry says, dismissing any notion that deals with global operators such as Netflix are losing their lustre. "We're looking forward to the increased competition with the new streamers coming out of America imminently. They're our biggest new buyers and it's a great opportunity for us - it has been for a while and continues to be."

Determining how long the likes of HBO Max will want to co-produce with European partners remains to be seen, particularly with US-based operators' eyes on longer-term vertical integration, but Berry says "an element of local content remains key."

"We absolutely expect all of those services to get global scale, it makes complete sense for them to do so. As a studios business with content that comes from all around the world, and that we sell as a distributor, I think it's great for us and could result in some brilliant new partnerships."

ITVS, which has also seen format growth with its reality stalwart *Love Island* amongst others, is also looking to short-form as a revenue stream. The company invested in soon-to-launch Quibi – along with numerous others including BBC Studios – and it's commissioned *Blood Orange* from ITVS-owned World Productions, interactive dating show *The Hot Drop* from ITV Entertainment, and an all-female practical jokers series hosted by Cara Delevigne from ITV America-owned Sirens Media. Berry says short-form is an area that's "evolving".

"There is still drama cost inflation but producers are managing it really well"
Ruth Berry,
ITV Studios

So too is the role of UK Screenings week. "We have had an influx of buyers, hundreds of them are now attending. We've had to move venues several times and we're bursting at the seams this year too," she says.

"It's a fantastic opportunity to have our buyers in town, captivate them in one place, immerse them in our most exciting dramas and catch up as the year kicks off. It's definitely something we'd like to extend to more of our catalogue - so watch this space." **TBI**

Key ITV Studios dramas

Romulus "This one is from Cattleya for Sky Italia and takes period content to a whole new level," says Berry. "It is set in pre-Rome and is shaping up to be absolutely amazing, the ability to shoot in archaic Latin is incredible and with its ambition and scale, it's everything we hoped it would be and more"

Vigil From World Productions for the BBC, this is "a really great contemporary and pacey action thriller, in a very claustrophobic setting," the ITVS exec says. "We're super excited about it, it has a fantastic cast and scripts. I can't wait to see the likes of Suranne Jones, Rose Leslie and Joseph Paterson on screen, and I'm sure our clients can't too"

Little Birds Berry describes this one as "a gorgeous, racy, sumptuous and sexy show. It's something very unique on our slate and an indulgent luxury for viewers. Warp Films has done an amazing job - we're very excited. Sky is really excited too and I'm looking forward to seeing our partners reactions to the extended scenes for the first time at the drama festival"

The Singapore Grip (below) This is another "brilliantly luxurious" period family saga, Berry, says, filmed in Singapore and produced by Mammoth Screen. "There is great warmth, comedy, wit and high drama – so it adds great breadth and depth to our catalogue"

QUALITY CONTENT FOR 2020

SCRIPTED

BLOODLANDS
HTM Television for **BBC One**

KATE AND KOJI
Hat Trick Productions for **ITV 1**

FACTUAL

BRADLEY WALSH & SON: BREAKING DAD
Hungry Bear Media for **ITV 1**

INSIDE MISSGUIDED
Pulse Films for **Channel 4**

FORMATS

WAR ON PLASTIC
Keo Films for **BBC One**

DENMARK PLANTS TREES
Tiki Media and STV for **TV2**

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Real life, feel good

All3Media is doubling down on UK Screenings with both format and scripted events, with dramas such as *The Nest* and *Baptiste*, as well as Studio Lambert format *Hustler*

All3Media International's decision to move to a new location for its scripted event at this year's UK Screenings - in the heart of Leicester Square at the Odeon Cinema – represents a renewed focus on the genre.

Shows on offer include returners such as *Baptiste* plus forthcoming BBC One surrogacy drama *The Nest* from All3-backed Studio Lambert, New Pictures real-life serial killer drama *Des*, which stars David Tennant, and Russell T Davies' show about the AIDS crisis in Red Productions' *Boys*, which will air on Channel 4.

The latter three all tackle real-life subjects, reflecting a wider trend apparent in the drama space and underlining the buoyant nature of UK scripted fare.

"There are more players in the market and all of them are hungry for quality scripted content," says Maartje Horchner, All3's EVP of content. Broadcaster budgets aren't increasing but they "will put their hands in their pockets for the right show."

Horchner points out that All3's slate last year included the hit series *Fleabag* but that show's much-vaunted creator, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, recently joined the growing number of writers to strike overall deals with streamers - and securing talent is tough.

"The competition is fierce, writers who are hot with broadcasters are often signed into multi-year deals with different projects and persuading them to develop a new idea needs a lot of work and patience. Directors and cast are equally in demand, it's about balance."

Horchner adds that All3's stable includes established writers such as Jack Thorne but the company is also looking to tap into rising talent. "A new writer can be accepted with an experienced producer and established director. If the main lead is a big name also, that helps to push it across the line. Equally, young and unknown cast can flourish with a strong script from an experienced writer… simply mix and match."

On the formats front, All3's slate includes *Hustler* – which will air on ABC in the US – and a surreal show from Studio Ramsay, titled *The Fantastical Factory Of Curious Crafts*. Talent shows include *The Search*, from ModestTV for BBC One, which follows British band Little Mix creating a new supporting band.

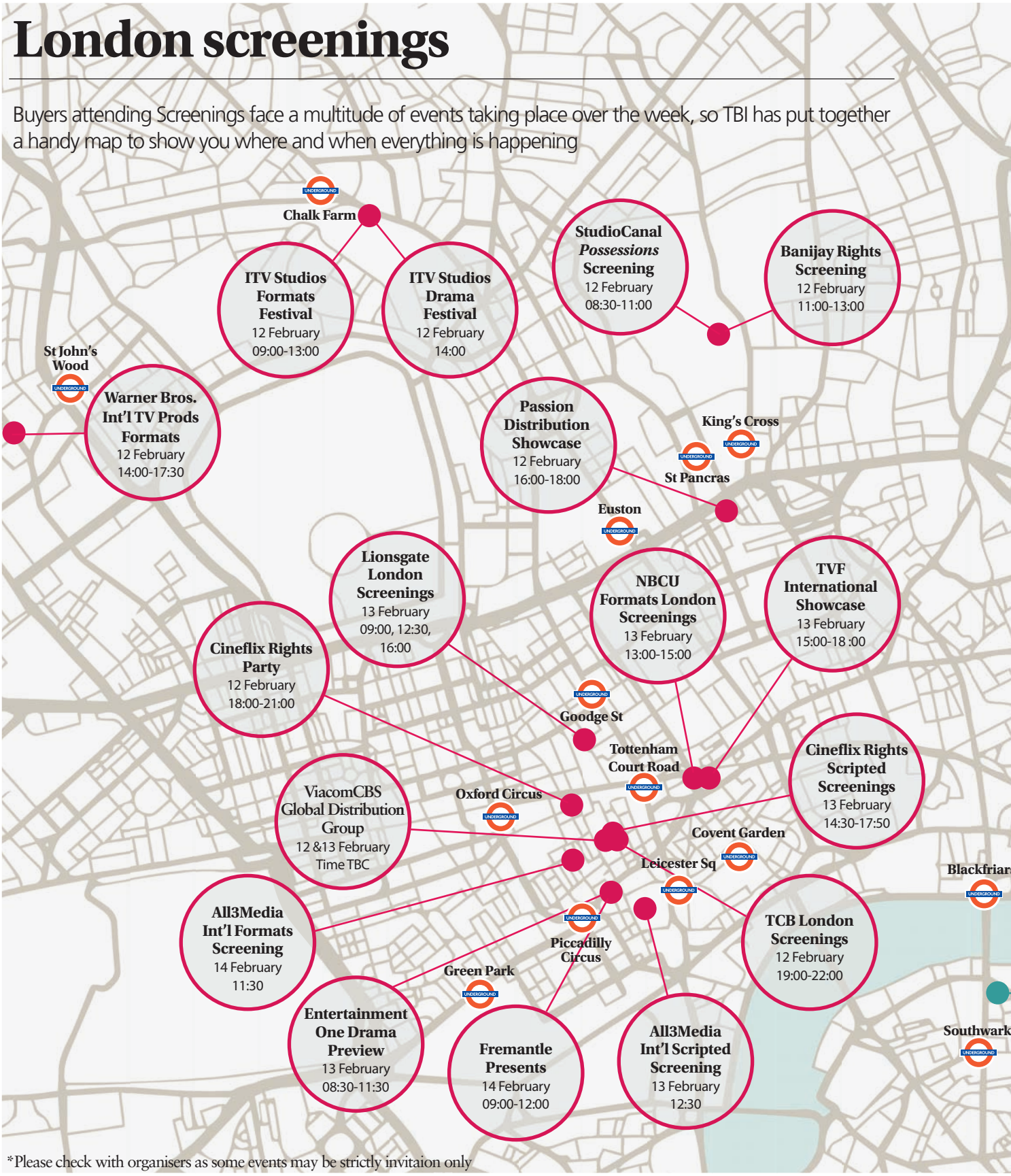
It builds on the ongoing trend for feel-good series and Nick Smith, EVP of formats, believes the demand for such IP won't dissipate.

"We're still seeing success with *Gogglebox* around the world," he adds, while newer formats such as *Celebrity Call Centre* and *The Dog House* are warm and uplifting, with "cruel reality" out of fashion. Smith adds that he expects SVOD's to "bet big on unscripted" this year and says the recent success of *The Masked Singer* will encourage broadcasters to take more risks on original, big entertainment shows. **TBI**

Baptiste is returning for a second season on BBC One in the UK

London screenings

Buyers attending Screenings face a multitude of events taking place over the week, so TBI has put together a handy map to show you where and when everything is happening



*Please check with organisers as some events may be strictly invitaion only

Day by day

Wednesday 12 February

StudioCanal *Possessions* Screening and Q&A
08:30-11:00
Everyman Cinema,
14-18 Handyside Street, N1C 4DN
Genre: Drama

ITV Studios Formats Festival
09:00-13:00
The Roundhouse, Chalk Farm Road, NW1 8EH
Genre: Formats

Banijay Rights Screening
11:00-13:00
Everyman Cinema,
14-18 Handyside Street, N1C 4DN
Genre: Drama

ITV Studios Drama Festival
14:00
The Roundhouse, Chalk Farm Road, NW1 8EH
Genre: Drama

Warner Bros. Int'l TV Production Formats Showcase
14:00-17:30
Abbey Road Studios, 3 Abbey Road, NW8 9AY
Genre: Formats

Passion Distribution Showcase
16:00-18:00.
The Standard, 10 Argyle St, WC1H 8EG
Genres: Unscripted, factual, entertainment

Cineflix Rights Showcase & Party
18:00-21:00
Scarlett Green, 4 Noel Street, W1F 8GB
Genres: Scripted, factual, unscripted

TCB Media Rights London Screenings
19:00-22:00
The Groucho Club,
45 Dean St, Soho, London W1D 4QB
Genre: Factual entertainment

ViacomCBS Global Distribution Group
Time TBC.
The Soho Hotel, 4 Richmond Mews, W1D 3DH

Thursday 13 February

Entertainment One Drama Preview
08:30-11:30
Picturehouse Central, Shaftesbury Ave, W1D 7DH
Genre: Scripted

Lionsgate London Screenings
09:00, 12:30, 16.00
Charlotte Street Hotel,
15/17 Charlotte Street, W1T 1RJ
Genre: Drama

All3Media International Screening
12:30
Odeon Leicester Square,
22-24 Leicester Square, WC2H 7LQ
Genre: Scripted

NBCU Formats London Screenings
13:00-15:00
NBCUniversal, 1 St Giles High Street, WC2H 8NU
Genres: Formats (scripted & unscripted)

Cineflix Rights Scripted Screenings
14:30-17:00
Soho House, 76 Dean Street, W1D 3SQ
Genre: Scripted

TVF International Showcase
15:00-18:00
Icetank Studios, 5-7 Grape Street, WC2H 8DW
Genre: Factual

ViacomCBS Global Distribution Group
Time TBC.
The Soho Hotel, 4 Richmond Mews, W1D 3DH

Friday 14 February

Fremantle Presents
09:00-12:00
Picturehouse Central, Shaftesbury Ave, W1D 7DH
Genres: Scripted, unscripted

All3Media International Screening
11:30
Boulevard Theatre, 6 Walker's Court, W1F 0BT
Genre: Formats

Moving on up

Banijay Group's distribution chief Tim Mutimer tells Richard Middleton how the company's scripted plans are developing ahead of a momentous 2020, which is set to see it subsume Endemol Shine Group

Banijay Group will look a lot different this time next year compared to the company preparing for February's UK Screenings.

The Marco Bassetti-fronted producer and distributor pulled off the deal of the year in 2019, adding the giant library and production interests of Endemol Shine Group to its existing - and already extensive - operations.

That takeover at present is moving through the glacially slow anti-trust process, meaning execs are unable to discuss how the future company might look, but it's clear that his own company's expansion is not the only thing on the mind of distribution chief and Banijay Rights CEO Tim Mutimer.

The roll-out of US-based streamers are providing fuel to an increasingly hot drama market, potentially pushing up the price of talent but also creating yet more demand from buyers. Incumbents such as Netflix and Amazon, meanwhile, are finding themselves in a more crowded space too, with Mutimer expecting "a really interesting 12 months" when it comes to rights.

Incumbents, he says, are keen to be seen to be flexible, but there remains "an ideal where if you have a show commissioned in one territory they'll still want a second window and rest of world, that's the aim."

Competition is affecting that dynamic, however, and Mutimer says that deals for per-territory rights are now more feasible, something that looks set to potentially grow as the new entrants make bigger moves.

Bäckström has been commissioned by C More and Swedish sibling network TV4

"*Thin Ice* is really topical and that is one of the trends we are trying to work - we're hoping it can repeat *Occupied's* success"
Tim Mutimer, Banijay

For Banijay, the aim seems to be focusing on building up talent but not necessarily getting into the mega-bucks talent deals, which have seen Sharon Horgan move to Amazon, for example.

"Talent is increasingly something that buyers ask about and want to know about. We had it with Carrie-Anne Moss on screen in *Wisting* and that really helps to sell the show and helps the platforms and broadcasters to sell it too."

Mutimer says Banijay will continue to work with production companies through first-look deals and joint ventures, adding that big name talent agreements are considered – potentially building on the recent agreement with adventure star Bear Grylls.

The exec also highlights that despite the soaring prices attached to some UK prodcos, interest remains because of a favourable rights situation. "We're definitely interested in exploring there," he adds.

For UK Screenings, Banijay is focusing on scripted. Shows include *Thin Ice*, a multi-layered drama from Banijay's prolific Nordic prodco Yellow Bird that explores the impact of geo-politics on potentially harmful oil drilling in the Arctic.

"That is a really topical show and that is one of the trends we are trying to work with. *Occupied* was on trend too, so we're hoping *Thin Ice* can repeat its success," Mutimer says. Others include Belgian psychological thriller *GR5* and detective series *Bäckström*, also from Yellow Bird." **TBI**

IT'S SHOWTIME...

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TCB MEDIA RIGHTS

Chris Bonney, CEO of rights at Cineflix Media

Richard Halliwell, MD at DRG/NENT Studios UK

Jimmy Humphrey, head of acquisitions & co-pros at TCB Media Rights

Diane Rankin, EVP rights at D360

Will Stapley, head of acquisitions at TVF International

Nick Tanner, director of sales & co-pros at Passion Distribution

Karen Young, CEO at Orange Smarty

Deal makers

No other sector has had to adapt as quickly to the rapidly changing content market as distributors, but select boutique and mid-sized players have been among those to have retooled themselves fastest. TBI's latest roundtable gathers some of the brightest UK-based distribution minds together to discuss the financing, commissioning, selling and marketing of content – and finds out who the key buyers will be in the coming years

The entire content business has consolidated rapidly recently, what is the role of boutique and mid-sized distributor in this world and how can you capitalise?

Chris Bonney: The opportunity is in our service to producers and broadcasters. Ultimately, it's about finding a platform or home – or these days, homes - to get the show financed in a world of decreasing commissioning funding. It's all in delivering something tailored and niche, and broadcasters appreciate that.

Will Stapley: Absolutely, although it is tricky. We always lose out to people gazumping content and people who are paying too much, so we have to be working with companies we really trust and who trust us and who know what we do, which is specialist - it's just factual. But it is harder, there's a Goldilock's tendency now in pre-buying and commissioning: if it's too hot it's not quite right, if it's too cold it's not quite right - it has to be just the right temperature for buyers to want it. And that means we need the right producer, a trusted commissioner, the right price and of course the right timing.

Karen Young: It's a completely different service we offer, too. If you want a big brand that is known and has a huge catalogue - and in the case of BBC Studios, a very prestigious line-up that they are very fortunate to get - then you can go there because that brings brand confidence, but it also takes you further down the catalogue. It doesn't necessarily mean people selling your product have seen it either, because how can you watch so many thousands of hours. With a smaller boutique, we all watch our content and are passionate about all our shows. We must work hard and sell hard.

Richard Halliwell: We have almost thrown away the older systems and processes in terms of what we do when we get a piece of content. Now, it is about what a particular project will require, we encourage a degree of hustle both for our acquisitions side and our sales teams in terms of what the producer needs in each particular case.

Diane Rankin: Absolutely. We don't just have a team that only looks after certain territories, we have people saying I can move this forward by doing this and we move the project forward together in that way, we work as a collective.

Consolidation has created a pinch point for distributors in securing a content pipeline, leading to some of you commissioning your own shows. How is this developing?

Jimmy Humphrey: We have been allowed to fail, which is refreshing. Not every project we have commissioned has recouped and perhaps some will never recoup, that is the nature of it and that is very important. For us, the most important thing is to have a mixed economy, we need straight acquisitions, we need to be doing deficit financing, pre-selling, co-producing and commissioning. Without all that, we aren't offering enough value to the producer.

RH: That is one of the fundamental changes. For us in scripted, terms like gap and deficit are redundant. We are very often the first at the table, the gap is the first thing in. Then there's tax credits and broadcasters. We're not in deficit financing very often anymore, unfortunately.

How hard has it become to secure talent, given the soaring demand?

CB: A beauty parade goes on, but it's about striking a chord with the producer who you've worked with before and building trust. It means we need to be talking regularly. There's also forecasting - we'll all have similar values on shows but some will have more value to us than others, because we're stronger in one genre to another and we know what we can do. So we might pay a bit more and even look at a loss leader on a certain title because you know what it will do for you across your catalogue. Those are the sorts of things we have to do at our scale to not be taken out of the market by a BBC Studios or Fremantle or the US studios. And it happens relatively regularly, particularly if we're playing in the US market - we can put really good solid offers down and they can just disappear.

JH: We've definitely been used as a stalking horse. For us, those first look and development deals - while they definitely work sometimes - can feel a bit old fashioned. Ten years ago, it seemed OK to give a producer $200,000 over two years in return for X hours but that was when there were thriving commissioning budgets. Gone are the days when you'd get a call from a producer asking if you'd like to sell their six-parter for Channel 4.

"If you want a big brand that has a a huge catalogue then that can bring brand confidence but it also takes you further down the catalogue"
Karen Young
Orange Smarty

Nick Tanner: I tend to agree - we find in the UK, for example, there is a compelling story to tell the producer that we could give you a first-look deal and over the next two or three years we wait for you to finally get a script read at the BBC. Or, we could just forget about the UK and take that project - which is brilliant - and anchor it outside of the UK. Then, we can back it into the UK. You cannot sit back and wait for a producer to get a script in and wait six to 12 months.

Talking of scripted, how hard is it to play in the market now?

CB: There were more than 500 series last year and there are always some nuggets that don't get picked up. Or if you go to the festivals early enough you will come across them. We picked up Israeli series *Tehran*, which has made a lot of noise and offers have been coming in thick and fast, which is great. You have to be scouring the market. We see investment back from unscripted pretty quickly, whereas with scripted, you might have to wait for second or third season.

And perhaps unlike most unscripted, if you have a scripted flop that can be major problem.

RH: It can be, which is why we only back winning horses! From a broad perspective, you balance between scripted and unscripted, where the return is quicker. Waiting for a primary UK broadcaster increases the risk so a relationship with the producer is key to allow you to step out of the UK with their beautifully crafted piece of work. The risk is increasing,

we're paying early stage development on scripted and we're starting to engage with talent, so we're much more invested before a project has even been pitched. We have to be more selective and cautious, and make sure we have the right people making those decision. You need someone with serious editorial chops to make those decisions.

And how are things looking for unscripted?

WS: Co-production is something we're doing and have done since we began. It's maybe not to such a great scale but we're going out to producers and saying you film what we need and we have our in-house who can put it together, and we know it will sell and make money for everyone. We then co-own that property too. And there's reversioning - turning existing shows into something else, or taking a foreign language show and translating it and putting an English voiceover and selling it again. It works. We had *Snake Master*, with a Thai talent who goes into the jungle and wrestles with snakes - and that has sold really well to some of the pan-regional channels.

JH: We are very fortunate to have someone as brilliant as Hannah Demidowicz to oversee our commissions but it doesn't often make sense commercially to do shows with talent. We'll absolutely still acquire shows with talent but for commissioning, it is much riskier. Saying that, we are launching an adventure survival show at MIPTV with two very new pieces of talent out of Canada, which is a full commission - that's more risky than normal but it's looking good so far.

NT: We have commissioned over a number of years. We have supported internal production companies internally by fully financing too and are continuing to do that but it is supply and demand. Male-skewing factual has boomed... now it's about identifying the next patch for distributor led-financing.

It seems the marketing burden on distributors has surged too, is that a fair assessment and what does it mean to distribution longer term?

WS: We are spending more on advertising for sure, but we had our best year ever in 2019 and it is probably because we are shouting louder. We've been quite modest about blowing our own trumpet but the more we do that the more people believe us - it is quite a British thing, but we are finding that the more we say we are actually very good at this, give us your show, producers start to take note.

"We don't just have a team that only looks after certain territories... we move the project forward as a collective"
Diane Rankin
D360

Direct-to-consumer is also growing, but is putting content onto YouTube still predominantly a marketing tool?

NT: It goes further than that. We have a small network of YouTube channels managed directly – we had clip rights so we thought why not truncate some of the docs and put them on YouTube within a brand and look at the data. It's now grown into a viable business that we're expanding. There are more barriers to entry and it is acorns at the moment, but our strategy is evolving day by day. We're looking at the value of commissioning our in-house to produce for You Tube too, and maybe reversioning and repackaging content.

There are so many potential buyers now, who is key now?

CB: There are more routes to markets, for sure. The challenge is still finding the best route for each show and finding the best home - and then you are often narrowing down quite quickly in terms of targets. In scripted, we often find there are only two or three buyers, and that's scary and exciting. I wouldn't say prices are escalating on individual deals, but there are now more windows and routes to exploitation so rights management is key. Exploitation on YouTube, making difficult decisions about non-exclusive AVOD rights on a title when that might preclude a US deal down the line - that's where we have to make strategic decisions. One of the biggest things is money now over money in three-to-five years. And that is the producer's decisions and it's dependant on their business plan. It depends, but it can make complete sense to give a show a global deal if it's topical or needs to be aired.

RH: I do think the sheen from those deals is dulling a bit though, in all genres. A year ago it'd be, "Oh, you've got a Netflix show." It was good for reputation

and there was a good premium to be had. That premium is diminishing and the talent is less attracted to the deals they have to sign up to be on those platforms. And, although it is still really important especially in scripted, there is increasingly now an eyebrow raised - because we know that a Netflix show means the premium has gone down, it's been given away for a hamburger today rather than payment tomorrow. It's not looked upon negatively but it's not that incredible deal anymore – it's more, "Oh, you took an Amazon deal."

WS: And as buyers are becoming more picky in linear, with VOD there are some really surprising numbers generated for one-offs, for example, that in broadcast wouldn't have had a chance. They're generating extraordinary numbers, and it makes us think, yes, I'm glad I did that deal as a tester - these things are proving themselves as subscribers go up.

DR: It's true – but so many producers come to us and say, "Can we have it on Netflix?" And we say, do you really want it on Netflix? Is that right for the show, is that the best deal you can get? Maybe it isn't actually best for the show.

Who are the key players going to be over the next few years?

WS: Roku is going to be a huge player, because they have their own channels and streaming service, they got in there for the future and it's so easy to use.

NT: There has been a lot of talk about AVOD and there's huge growth there. Roku is definitely one of the examples, as is Pluto, they've made huge strides. Their distribution is growing by the day and they are open to different types of approaches – portfolios, selling single content to existing networks, or channels.

WS: They're not too fussy either, they can have content on three, four, five platforms at once, they have that flexibility, which is great.

JH: It's about the revenue share. And we have that responsibility to be exploring that back catalogue.

The next 12 months look set to offer more challenges, not least with producers' terms of trade shifting in the UK. How will things change over the next few years?

KY: Terms of trade could be great because they will recognise the profits that could come from the international market - but they're going to be pulled by the broadcaster to make a show they want, which can be put across their various channels for the next few years. There is something in between – they have to be thinking with an international head and be collaborating with us more. There has to be a bit of a reality check to say this is your profit, don't squeeze it.

"We'll absolutely still acquire shows with talent but for commissioning, it is much riskier. Saying that, we are launching an adventure survival show at MIPTV with two very new pieces of talent out of Canada, which is a full commission"
Jimmy Humphrey
TCB Media Rights

WS: And some broadcasters seem to expect distributors to contribute ever more. Their budgets are lower, fair enough, but if we are putting that risk in and the pre-sales aren't coming in left, right and centre, then why should the distributor take a bigger risk if they won't take any more risk as a buyer? There has to be more shared risk across the whole industry.

DR: And some of those UK broadcasters know who the international partners will be on some shows they commission - so they know when they commission X, broadcasters Y and Z are going to come in, so they'll pay less because those other channels will come in.

JH: There is that and increasingly, which is not good news for the producer, deals happen between the broadcaster and distributor directly. That gap that might have been there, which would have ordinarily been the producer's to control, is not theirs anymore. Most broadcasters now operate that model, so as a distributor you have to adapt too. The producer is making show for less money and they are mortgaged even more to a distributor, so it's not attractive being a producer. I can understand that frustration.

So what has to give?

JH: It's probably on the broadcaster's side but they are squeezed as well. Greater risk will probably end up landing on distributors.

WS: But only if we let it. There is so much consolidation and change, we have to ride the wave.

RH: Broadcasters will always commission at the lowest possible rate they can but now you don't have to play that game. There are very few producers who aspire to be at the bottom end of the market. There is a role for us to play, to say, "yes that's fine, that's what we can get out of the UK market, but let's go and play with the rest of the world." Content from the UK is among the best internationally and the world knows that. Just because the BBC isn't paying what it should because it is so squeezed, that's fine - the money exists out there in the world. **TBI**

MIPTV 20.20 | The global content market for the future

Stepping up to the mantle

Fremantle's Jamie Lynn reflects on an eclectic slate and tells Richard Middleton that budgets are not necessarily the determining factor in cutting through an increasingly cluttered content ecosystem

With the 530-plus scripted series emerging from the US last year alone, it's little wonder that Fremantle's EVP and head of EMEA distribution Jamie Lynn is focused on shows that can cut through.

Those scripted series numbers, courtesy of FX and its chief John Landgraf, have provided an annual marker as to the growth of drama Stateside and there is some correlation with the rate at which scripted budgets are increasing too.

Yet Lynn is clear that the cost of a show doesn't reflect how successful the resultant series might be, despite "enormous demand" for stand out shows.

"We're still seeing plenty of expensive, star and talent-led projects with epic budgets, but plenty of amazing and original 'cut through' projects made at cost effective budgets. A smaller budget does not mean 'middle of the road'. It's exciting to exceed creative and commercial expectations regardless of budget."

That's not to say Fremantle hasn't been dipping its toe into pricey dramas – and securing talent to produce this product. But Lynn says the aim is to develop a "guiding philosophy that puts our creative's partners at the centre of our business and strategy, which has been a hugely effective talent magnet."

He points to Paolo Sorrentino as a case in point. The director worked with Fremantle-backed Italian prodco Wildside on his first TV project – *The Young Pope* – and Lynn says his experience was key to securing other talent, such as Luca Guadagnino, who is onboard HBO and Sky Italia's *We Are Who We Are*.

Securing budgets remains an ongoing challenge and Lynn readily admits that across both scripted and unscripted, distributors are being asked for more funding as broadcaster budgets remain static.

"This is why there's been a great rise in the importance of international co-productions, pre-sales and creative partnerships to help fund these ever-challenging gaps in financing. If we believe in a project, we will always find a path to get it funded, but the challenge is real."

One such project on the slate for UK Screenings is *The Luminaries*, set in 1860's New Zealand and from Working Title Films and Southern Light Films for BBC Two in the UK and TVNZ. Other dramas include Syrian civil war series *Fertile Crescent*, while unscripted highlight is *Enslaved*, executive produced and hosted by Samuel L. Jackson.

For Lynn, UK screenings is becoming increasingly important as a time for buyers while the surge of AVOD is also "super interesting." Lynn is particularly buoyed by the emergence of larger players that can reach viewers at scale.

"Historically, the quality of AVOD platforms and their content offerings led to very little impact in major territories. We can see this shifting rapidly." **TBI**

Enslaved retraces the sea voyages that took Africans to the New World

"A smaller budget does not mean 'middle of the road'. It's exciting to exceed expectations regardless of budget"
Jamie Lynn, Fremantle

Strutting its stuff

NBCUniversal's UK Screenings slate reflects the rising demand for local scripted product but reality is returning to become a key revenue driver, says format sales and production chief Ana Langenberg

Don't Hate The Playaz uses influencers and celebrities to attract a younger audience to the show

Surging interest in drama might be continuing unabated but for Ana Langenberg, SVP of format sales and production at NBCUniversal Formats, it is domestic content that is providing opportunity.

Langenberg's London-based division has enjoyed "such high demand for local scripted content, particularly across Asia and territories such as the Middle East and Turkey," she says, meaning plenty of opportunity to shop its slate of scripted formats to sate local demand while offering security for buyers.

Deals have included a first scripted format agreement in Japan with Fuji TV, which ordered an adaptation of *Suits*, with a second season now being discussed. *House* has been remade in Turkey with Karga Seven Pictures and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* has been rebooted for locals in French Canada.

"We're really keen to continue conversations on our other scripted titles such as *Five Bedrooms*, which sees five unfulfilled single friends make the crazy decision to buy a house together, and follows their financial, social and romantic struggles," Langenberg says.

Despite the ongoing drama boom, the NBCU exec says there is also "a bit of a renaissance in reality TV and more demand for entertainment and gameshow formats that really tap into the reality genre."

Social media has, she adds, been a key driver in this – as have the SVODs who have become regular buyers of the genre. "This provides so many more opportunities for our formats such as *Spy Games*, which has just launched on Bravo in the US," Langenberg says. "At its core, it's a reality competition show, based on a real, secret World War II spy programme, that both intrigues and entertains."

"Social media provides so many more opportunities for our formats, such as *Spy Games*"
Ana Langenberg, NBCUniversal Formats

Other key shows on the slate at UK Screenings include *The Big Show*, which airs on BBC One in the UK, and comedy variety programme *That's My Jam*, which will be hosted and executive produced by Jimmy Fallon for NBC. It's also preparing *Who Are You Calling Fat*, the third instalment of Love Production's social experiment and documentary series. "The first two – *Muslims Like Us* and *Christians Like Us* received critical acclaim in the UK and Australia respectively," Langenberg says.

Langenberg also points to *Best Parent?*, which compares vastly diverse parenting styles in a reality competition format, and hip-hop comedy show *Don't Hate The Playaz*, as "timely." The latter, she adds, also provides a platform to attract the much-vaunted but hard to reach younger audiences and allowing "young, fresh celebrities, influencers and reality stars to take to the stage and test their hip hop knowledge."

"The same can be said for our series *Blind Date*, which offers a fresh and hilarious take on the modern dating scene and our new format *You Should Know*, which hails from Israel. It's the first quiz show in which the nation's social media feeds are put to the test."

Much has been made of NBCU's US-based Peacock and Langenberg says the hybrid streamer "is going to be an important partner," but prefers to keep details of how that might be to herself. Whether the on-demand service will provide a testing ground for Langenberg's newer formats remains to be seen but it's clear what she wants from buyers as a whole.

"My favourite show of the moment has to be *The Masked Singer*, which has certainly shaken up the industry in recent months. I love the fact that Fox took a chance on a completely new and different show – a Korean format that has truly broken the mould, rather than sticking to existing brands or reviving old formats. I'd love to see more broadcasters do that in the US and Europe, and really give way to new ideas to be tested again." **TBI**

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Advancing AVOD

2020 is set to be a decade-defining year for Endemol Shine Group but it's not just because of the Banijay Group takeover. Matt Creasey talks to Richard Middleton

For years, the ad-supported side of streaming was the largely ignored sibling to glossy and glamorous SVOD's, but the industry is shifting fast. As operators such as Tubi, Roku and ViacomCBS-supported Pluto TV enter the fray, the result is an "existential threat" to broadcast.

That's the view of Matt Creasey, who has more idea about the incoming trends set to land on the content landscape than most others because he's doing a fair few of the deals. The LA-based exec, EVP of sales & acquisitions at Endemol Shine International (ESI), says that AVOD will pose a major headache for broadcasters, as companies such as his – soon to be taken over by Banijay Group – realise the potential.

"We're seeing such financial growth in AVOD services, we have to ask whether we should even be doing those linear deals that will cut us off from doing other deals for so long," he says.

"For companies like us with around 65,000 hours in back catalogue, [AVOD] is really important. There is an existential threat for the broadcasters – I can see deals changing over the next few years – because, if I do those deals and take content off the market for that amount of time, is it actually worth it?

"Or is there something I could do instead. That option, for broadcasters, is something they will hate, I'd think."

Creasey is sharing oversight of ESI's global sales operation following the exit of Cathy Payne and he says that in major territories, the revenue share nature of AVOD provides "recoup of costs very quickly."

For a distributor such as ESI, they provide monthly income, flexible models that allow content to be taken down with 30-days notice, and a place to monetise content that previously was tough to sell.

"In Australia, for example, it's very important that we're still doing business with the Foxtels but then what do you do next? It's those second windows, when previously we might have waited for another broadcaster, where we can say let's put it on AVOD."

Creasey adds that while "linear is by no means dead… broadcasters can't expect the world for the diminishing fees they are willing to pay."

Reflecting on ESI's current slate, the trend for feel-good formats continues, Creasey says. "Some of the shows we've just launched into the US feed into that feeling. We've got *Lego Masters* for Fox, which is utterly feel good and slightly nerdy, and *Biggest Loser* for US is relaunching. Previously it focused on people needing to lose weight, now it's more holistic about general mental well-being. It has a softer approach without that sharp edge that just doesn't sit comfortably with viewers now. *All Together Now* is the same, it's very uplifting." **TBI**

"There's an existential threat for broadcasters - I can see deals changing over the next few years"
Matt Creasey
Endemol Shine

Lego Masters has launched on Fox in the US and been upscaled from the original that debuted in the UK

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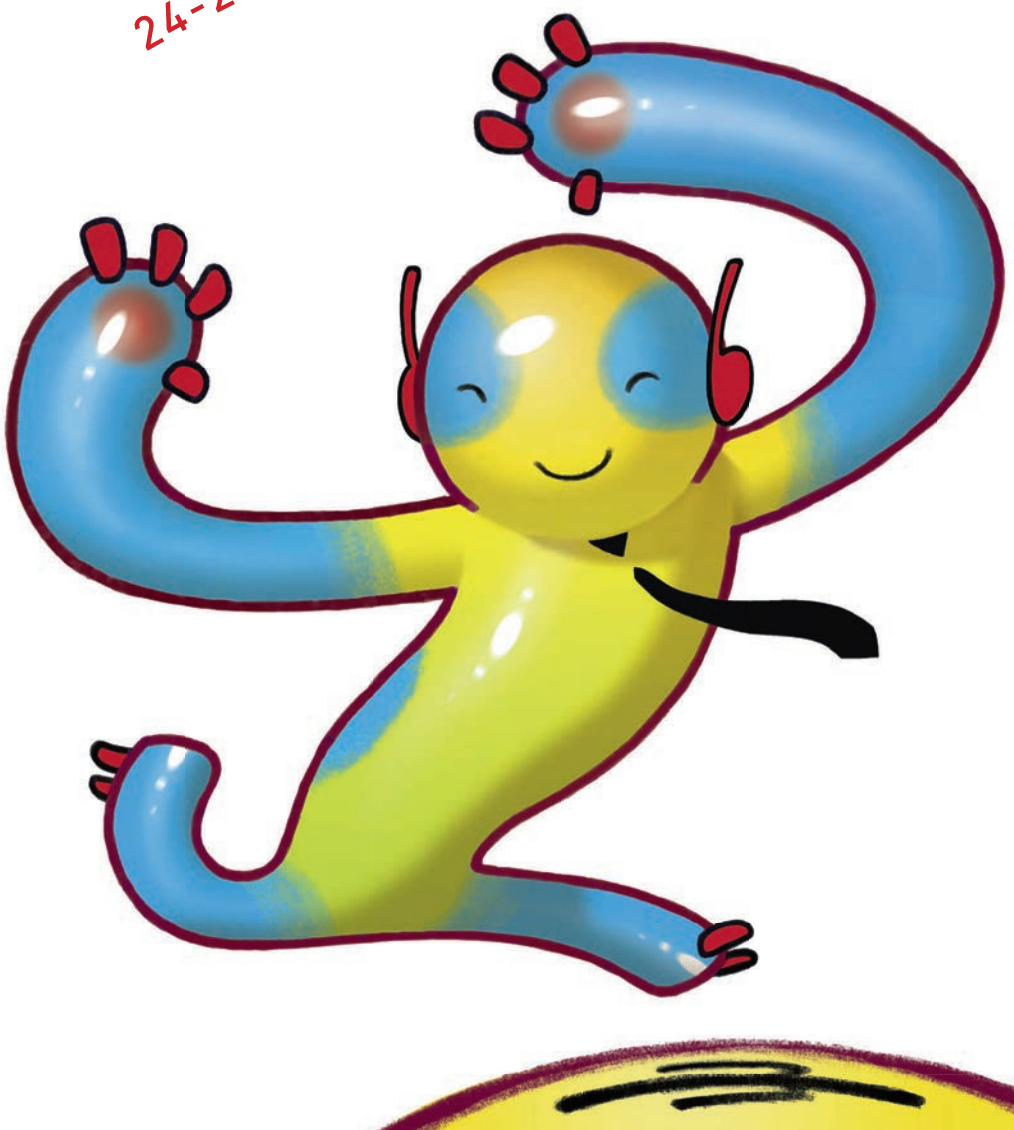

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Comedy: not just for Christmas

"When it comes to family comedy, the industry has collectively dropped the ball. In a decade's time, what comedy reunion will 17 million of us be tuning in for?"

On Christmas Day I did what, it turns out, over 17 million other people in Britain did. I watched the triumphant return of *Gavin And Stacey*, the most eagerly anticipated and talked about show of the season. It brilliantly delivered us a mixture of the familiar, with enough new ingredients and surprises to earn it the accolade of one of the most watched shows of the decade. It was reminiscent of previous years where the Christmas specials of comedies such as *Only Fools And Horses*, *The Vicar Of Dibley* or *The Royale Family* ruled the roost in the festive schedules. For one day only, drama and entertainment were the mere appetisers for the comedy main course.

However, as the harsh reality of January and February kicks in, we cannot escape the fact that when it comes to broad, mainstream comedy – the sort that can attract the kind of ratings channel heads so desperately need - the rest of the year offers slim pickings.

When it comes to family comedy, the industry has collectively dropped the ball. The inexorable rise of high-end, popular and let's face it, sexy, drama, along with the explosion of low cost, high-volume, ratings-winning reality TV and factual entertainment, has hit the comedy genre hard - and the high-risk, big-budget, mainstream sitcoms the hardest of all. Unable, or unwilling, to refresh itself, compete effectively and hold on to its ever-dwindling audiences, we all failed to react as it steadily became a luxury treat and no longer a mainstay of the weekly schedule.

Of course, we have our excuses. Mainstream sitcoms and comedies are notoriously hard to get right, so you're forced to take risks and keep trying until you unearth the next gem. That's always been the case, but the landscape we operate in today is one where risk taking is low, and fear of failure is high. History is littered with examples of sitcoms that struggled to find their audiences in the beginning, needing time and patience to build – commodities that are rare, if non-existent, these days. Having witnessed the vitriol from the press and public directed towards a writer when an attempt at a family sitcom failed to hit the bullseye on its first outing, is it any wonder some of our best comedy minds favour delivering a 'critically successful cult classic' to a smaller channel, rather than put their heads above the parapet of mainstream primetime?

All of which has left me wondering – in 10 years' time, what comedy reunion will 17 million of us be tuning in for?

I would love to see us all make a concerted effort to get creative with the way we develop, produce and deliver mainstream, family comedy. That includes how we support writers with ideas and the inclination to try, and how we help broadcasters balance the books and take risks. We can take heart from the examples of shows that have bucked the trend and justified their place in the schedules. *Miranda*, *Car Share* and *Mrs Brown's Boys* are recent proof of the adage: if you build it, the audience will come – and they will come in their millions. *Not Going Out* will hit a 13th season in 2022, the return of *Red Dwarf* is a ratings juggernaut for Dave, and a revival of *Birds Of A Feather* was welcomed with open arms by ITV's audience. These shows delivered, but we can't keep relying on reviving old classics or the occasional roll of the dice with something that has a big name attached to it.

I don't want to detract from the brilliant comedy that gets made, wins awards and deservedly holds a place in the offerings of non-mainstream platforms, but we need a healthy mix. I applaud all those writers, producers and commissioners that continue to beat the drum for mainstream comedy, however, I fear we are going to have to be more daring to win back the trust of the schedulers, which is what I genuinely believe the public want.

Can our resolution be to make mainstream comedy something the audience can enjoy all year round, and create new contenders for a festive special? Otherwise in 2029 we'll be calling on Ruth and James to bring back *Gavin & Stacey* to save Christmas once more. **TBI**

Simon Lupton is co-founder and producer at Seven Seas Films

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